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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 OUAGADOUGOU 000827

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: BURKINA FASO: HOPE AND CHALLENGES NEAR THE COTE D'IVOIRE
BORDER

REF: A) Ouagadougou 439; B) Ouagadougou 424; C) Ouagadougou 272

Classified by Amb. Jeanine Jackson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (U) SUMMARY: Officials in Western Burkina Faso are depending on the successful implementation of the Ouagadougou Peace Accords for their region's economic survival and long-term stability. The flashpoint of the February food price riots, Bobo-Dioulasso, still bears the scars seven months later. Additional food shortages, infrastructure problems, and inadequate schools exacerbate the underlying economic problems, which were made worse by the Cote d'Ivoire crisis. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) September 12-15, PAO and ConOff traveled to Bobo-Dioulasso and Banfora in the West of Burkina Faso to conduct outreach to the local Muslim community and to facilitate American voter registration for the upcoming presidential election. During the trip, EmbOffs met with local and regional officials as well as religious leaders. In addition, an estimated 500 individuals from the Muslim community participated in PAS-sponsored programming.

"La Vie Chere" Continues

13. (C) Bobo was the flashpoint for the February cost-of-living riots across Burkina Faso, and according to Fatou Ziba Deputy Mayor of the Dafra sector, the city has not yet fully recovered. Most traffic signals, where there are any, are still out. Food prices are higher than ever before, which reflects the situation throughout Burkina. According to Dafra officials, rice doubled in price this year hitting the poorest communities the hardest. Last year's meager harvest is impacting more people now because food stocks have run out. While this year's harvest looks good - it is still a month or so away.

14. (C) Officials in Banfora also highlighted the difficult economic situation for much of the population. However, they were hopeful that, in spite of heavy rains and some localized flooding, the crops would be good this year. Furthermore, despite these continuing difficulties, no interlocutor suggested that additional civil unrest was imminent. However, Dafra Deputy Mayor Ziba said that the discontent that sparked the February riots was still simmering under the surface.

Hope for Peace in Cote d'Ivoire

15. (C) The Secretary General of the Haut-Bassins Region, Ahmed Ouattara Sory, reported that much faith has been put in the successful implementation of the Ouagadougou peace accords. He indicated that the economic viability of the area was hit

particularly hard by the Cote d'Ivoire crisis. However, the recent stability had already yielded improved cross-border trade and increased transportation through the region. Assuming the Presidential elections in Cote d'Ivoire are peaceful, he expected this trend to continue upward.

¶6. (C) The Secretary General of the Cascades Region, Paul Yameogo, and the Deputy Mayor of Banfora, Amadou Tiekoura Tou, reiterated this sentiment, noting a significant increase in road and rail commerce through their region since the signing of the Accords. Banfora officials raised another interesting consequence of the renewed cross-border stability. When schools in Cote d'Ivoire were closed during the crisis, many families sent their children to schools in and around Banfora. Now that stability has returned, they indicated that many children were returning to Cote d'Ivoire for school this year. However, Tiekoura was dismayed to learn that Pres. Gbagbo had proposed a delay of the November 30 elections. He asserted that "failure of the accords is not an option for the economic livelihood of this region."

The 2008-2009 School Year

¶7. (C) Local officials in Bobo and Banfora are preparing for the October 1 opening of school. Interlocutors in both regions indicated that enrollment in all levels of the system is increasing. Unfortunately, an unintended consequence of the focus on primary education in recent years has been severe overcrowding in middle and high schools. Happily, the Secretary General of Banfora, Batoro Adama, said that it was now "rare" for primary-school-aged children (even girls) not to go to school. However, he added that girls are

OUAGADOUGO 00000827 002 OF 002

still the first to be kept home when the upper school is outside the community, too expensive, or overcrowded.

¶8. (C) The Secretary General of the Haut-Bassins Region told PAO that Bobo had not benefited from the GOBF's pilot project to make free textbooks available for public school students. This additional cost and the growing overcrowding problem are making education beyond the primary years impossible for most poor families. The Deputy Mayor of Dafra lamented that every day she receives desperate parents looking for help in order to continue their children's education. In addition, most primary schools in her district have resorted to two half-day classes to keep class numbers below fifty. In Banfora, officials insisted that all children received free school books under the GOBF's program last year. However, when pressed, one elementary teacher admitted to PAO that often children share books in order to have enough for everyone. In both regions, school administrators said they solicit private book donations to support libraries and foreign language courses.

COMMENT

¶9. (SBU) It is clear that local officials in Western Burkina Faso are pinning their hopes for future economic development on the successful implementation of the Ouagadougou peace accords. Were the accords to fail, and Cote d'Ivoire experiences additional turmoil, instability could spill over into Burkina Faso and affect this region, which already suffers from rising food prices, lack of infrastructure, and limited accessibility of education.

JACKSON